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Holocaust Annulment

The genocide of the Jews is turned morally inside out. The victims are transformed into the villains — making it not only appropriate, but righteous, to have another go at ridding the world of them.

By Kathleen Hayes

Published July 17, 2025

It's embarrassing to admit this, but every few days I pull up the Twitter/X account of the Trotskyist group I was long a member of, and see what they're up to. A therapist would probably call this a form of rumination and advise me to stop, but having spent 25 years immersed in the party I believed was the last best hope for humanity, it's beyond me to feel indifferent. Like a woman long and happily divorced, I still feel compelled to haunt my ex's social media. I see my ex-comrades howling for a "free, red Palestine," glance at their turgid articles proclaiming the urgent necessity of proletarian revolution, and I wonder yet again what I ever saw in them. But a few days later, I'm back.

It's the people I can't get out of my system. These are men and women I worked with, joked with, sat through interminable meetings with, ate curry dinners with, shared my most cherished beliefs with. We knew the outside world thought we were crazy or horrible, and knowing that just brought us closer. A sign of approval from a particularly respected comrade, or a motion of censure — for many years, these were the things that filled me with pure euphoria, or total despair.

So I compulsively search for signs of them on my former party's postings. I genuinely don't care about members I don't know, the young people who came around the party after I quit in 2016. I'm looking for people whose homes I've visited and dogs I've petted, whose voices still resound in my mind. When I find one of them captured in a photo, my feelings are mixed. There's some small satisfaction in having scratched my itch, but mostly I feel sad.

The party contained some truly talented writers, organizers, speakers. Some were thought to have had dazzling careers ahead of them in physics or economics or other fields. They gave up these futures to toil in obscurity, ostensibly for the liberation of humanity but ultimately to champion terror. There's a strange private sorrow that comes with knowing what these women and men could give to the world, and seeing what they are. "Oh, John," I think. Or "Oh, Karen," or Mark, or Kate. What are you still doing there, wasting your life in that cult?

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bespectacled, elderly man I once loved dearly. I'll call him Harry. He was born in a Displaced Persons camp shortly after World War II. He was a fluid writer, responsible for much of the party's coverage of the Middle East. He was prone to exclaiming "Oy, gevalt!" at moments of excitement. Whatever his family's Holocaust experience, he grew up fervently Jewish and Zionist. He once told me that as a young person first seeing "Fiddler on the Roof," he completely supported Tevye's decision to declare Chava dead after she married a gentile.

But there he is, photographed at a small demonstration in defense of a communist "pro-Palestinian" protester, Michael Pröbsting, then being prosecuted in Austria. I do a quick google and learn that on Oct. 7, Pröbsting's organization issued a leaflet calling to "support the heroic Palestinian resistance," "expel the occupiers" and struggle "for the destruction of the Zionist state."

Harry looks almost unchanged but with a few more gray hairs, and he is carrying a placard that reads: "This Austrian-born Jew says: Isn't one genocide enough for you?"

Oh, Harry, I think. How did you come to adopt such a vile, impervious-to-reality stance against your own people? And what attracted all the other Jews who filled our virulently anti-Zionist party — including, for all those years, and however ambivalent I was about my late-discovered Jewish identity, me?

I will spend the latter part of my life trying to understand the first. I'm far from there, but I'm sure part of the answer lies in our society's twisted obsession with victimhood.

As a teenager, I identified, in a weird, narcissistic way, with Anne Frank. I've since learned this is very common; privileged Western girls often "see themselves" in Anne not so much because they relate to her life, as that they're fascinated by, and a bit jealous of, the martyrdom conferred by her death. As the philosopher Tzvetan Todorov wrote, "no one wants to be a victim, but everyone wants to have been one." Victimhood confers moral authority.

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So we get competing groups vying for top victim status, like a gruesome kind of football. Jews have generously—maybe too generously—agreed to give the coveted ball to other, more deserving, oppressed groups.

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lessons from the ultimate experience of victimhood, the Holocaust. The mass murder of the Jews was made to represent a universal warning about man's inhumanity to man, rather than a hideous chapter of Jewish suffering. Banging on about Jewish victimhood arouses resentment, and threatens the modern conviction that Jews are oppressors. So we get the grotesque spectacle of people trying to deny the Jews their own suffering or, even more perversely, use it against them.

As I write this, I'm being bombarded on Twitter with messages telling me to stop killing babies, Epstein/Mossad innuendo, a "Hitler was right" meme, even an approving share of "Throw the Jew Down the Well." Many of these messages come from people proclaiming their Jewishness. Like my ex-comrades, these Jews take particular pleasure in appropriating the most brutal reminders of Nazi savagery — "concentration camp," "ghetto," "genocide," "Nazi" and, of course, "Holocaust" — to use against Israel, inflicting maximum pain on the Jewish people. And because they speak "As a Jew," they can be assured of a warm welcome from the anti-Zionist tribe — until and unless they grow uneasy about their chosen tribe's predilection for drawing horns and bloody fangs on prominent Jews, or the occasional swastika.

The great British novelist Howard Jacobson explains better than I possibly could how equating Zionist Jews with the Nazis is an attempt to retroactively "abrogate" the Holocaust, rendering it null and void.

"Show that Jews intend a final solution on someone else," he writes, "and we can fancy a retrospective justice to have been at work—the Jews being punished for a crime they were yet to commit. Call this Holocaust annulment." The genocide of the Jews is turned morally inside out. The victims are transformed into the villains — making it not only appropriate, but righteous, to have another go at ridding the world of them.

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For generations, Westerners have hated Jews for reminding them of the monstrous crimes committed against them. Declaring the Jews guilty of those same horrors — hurling the charges, with sadistic glee, against the victims — is above all a way of casting off their own sense of guilt.

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drip, drip of unremitting revilement in the western media and on western campuses had worn away [the Jews'] humanity. How sympathy had wearied and turned to scorn. How the west was of a mind to expunge its guilt."

The drip, drip, drip of revilement has become an Al-Aqsa Flood, and the dam is clearly not holding.

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